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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

January 18, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

I urge all members of the Democratic Caucus to vote in favor of granting Secretary of Defense designate Lloyd J. Austin III the legal waiver necessary to enable him to be confirmed as President-elect Joe Biden's Secretary of Defense.

Secretary-designate Austin has been retired from the military for more than four years, but an exemption from Congress is necessary to become Secretary of Defense for anyone who has not been separated from active duty military service for at least seven years. I share the concerns of many that we must be sure to maintain strong civilian control of the military, as required in our Constitution. I have spoken with Secretary-designate Austin multiple times since his nomination, and I am one hundred percent convinced that he understands this crucial principle and that he is completely committed to upholding it. He has agreed to appear before the members of the House Armed Services Committee to address the issue, and he has already spoken to numerous House members and made it clear that he will ensure that civilian control of the military is maintained.

President-elect Biden has also already expressed his intent to nominate civilians with strong backgrounds and expertise to fill the roles of Deputy Secretary of Defense and Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. Further, Secretary-designate Austin's Chief of Staff will also be an equally experienced civilian expert in defense policy. In short, I have no doubt that civilian control of the military will be completely upheld by Secretary-designate Austin when he is our Secretary of Defense.

I also strongly believe it is critically important that Secretary-designate Austin be confirmed as quickly as possible after President-elect Biden becomes President on January 20<sup>th</sup>. For four years, the Department of Defense has continued to deal with attempts by President Trump and his cronies to undermine the independence and capability of the Department. We need a Senate-confirmed Secretary of Defense who has been selected by President-elect Biden as soon as possible to address this deeply disturbing reality. The risk involved in delay is great.

Lastly, we cannot overlook the historical significance of Secretary-designate Austin being the first African American selected to be Secretary of Defense in our history. Our country is facing a violent insurrection from right wing extremists, driven primarily by white supremacist organizations. These hate-groups made up a very dangerous element of the efforts to violently

obstruct and deny the American people our duly-elected President, and threaten the peace and stability of our country in countless other ways. Troubling evidence continues to emerge that the military itself has servicemembers sympathetic to extreme views and white supremacist causes. Blocking Secretary-designate Austin's confirmation will send a false, dangerous message that Congress believes a highly qualified African American is unable to do the job.

In the face of these realities, it would be a grave mistake for the United States House of Representatives to block Secretary-designate Austin from being confirmed as our Secretary of Defense.

Again, I urge you to vote in favor of the waiver and pave the way for Secretary-designate Austin to begin serving as Secretary of Defense as soon as possible after President-elect Biden is sworn in as President.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Adam Smith". The signature is stylized with a large initial "A" and a long, sweeping underline.

Adam Smith  
Chair, House Armed Services Committee